

Washington, D.C. – Today Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore) announced that the FY08 Department of Defense Authorization Act includes provisions from the “Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act,” a bill he introduced in May. It was the first comprehensive bill to address the refugee crisis in Iraq. In early November thirty-four House Democrats and Republicans joined Congressman Blumenauer in sending a letter to Armed Services Committee Chairman Ike Skelton (D-MO) and Ranking Member Duncan Hunter (R-CA) supporting efforts to address the Iraqi refugees in the National Defense Authorization Act. The provisions included in the FY08 DoD Authorization provide 5,000 special immigrant visas for the next five years, require the Secretary of State to establish a refugee processing program in Iraq and other countries in the region, and direct the Secretary of State to designate a special coordinator at the Embassy in Baghdad.

“On behalf of the millions of Iraqis who have been displaced from their homes, I am truly happy that these provisions have been included in this bill,” said Congressman Blumenauer. “When I introduced the Responsibility to Iraqi Refugees Act back in May, these provisions were fundamental to addressing one of the worst humanitarian crises on the planet. More than four million Iraqis have fled their homes, and up until now the United States has failed to step up to do its part and help those Iraqis who have worked with our troops, government and aid organizations in Iraq. We must help those who have helped us, and by admitting more refugees into the country and designating a Special Coordinator, we are finally taking some of the first steps necessary to address this crisis.”

The following provisions were adopted from the Blumenauer refugee bill and included in the FY08 DoD Authorization Act:

In Country Refugee Processing for Iraqis Associated with the U.S. Government

The provision requires the Secretary of State to establish a refugee processing program in Iraq and in countries in the region for Iraqis threatened because of their association with the United States Government. All applicants must demonstrate they have a well founded fear of persecution. Iraqis who can apply directly to the United States in Iraq – rather than going through the United Nations referral system outside Iraq – include:

- Iraqis who were or are employed by or worked for the United States Government in Iraq.

- Iraqis who were or are employed in Iraq by a media or nongovernmental organization headquartered in the United States or an organization closely associated with the United States mission in Iraq that has received United States Government funding through an official and documented contract, award, grant, or cooperative agreement.
- Iraqis who are members of a religious or minority community with close family members in the United States.

The provision allows the Secretary to suspend in-country processing for periods of 90 days and requires reporting to the Congress outlining reasons for any suspension.

Special Immigrant Status For Iraqis Who Work For U. S. Government

The provision provides 5,000 special immigrant visas yearly for five years for Iraqis who have worked for the U.S. Government in Iraq and are threatened as a result. Applicants must have a positive recommendation or evaluation from a senior supervisor and be approved by the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq or his designee. The provision sunsets after five years.

Allows Iraqis in the United States who have been denied asylum, in part, because conditions in Iraq changed after Saddam Hussein's government fell to reapply.

Special Coordinators for Iraqi Refugees

The amendment directs the Secretary of State to designate a high-level special coordinator in the Embassy in Baghdad to handle Iraqi refugee and internally displaced person issues. He or she would be responsible for overseeing the in country processing of refugees and special immigrant visa applicants and would have authority to refer people directly to the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

Host Nation Support

The amendment requires the Secretary of State to consult with other countries about resettlement of refugee populations and to develop mechanisms in and provide assistance to countries with a significant population of displaced Iraqis to ensure the refugees' well-being and safety.